

The Klondike Gold Rush International Park will feature a system of markers to point out the natural and human history of the White Pass and Chilkoot Trails. What set the rush of 1898 apart from its sister rushes in California and Alaska was not the existence of the gold itself, but rather the drama inherent in getting to the Klondike. The one thing etched into the memories of those who participated in the frantic dash to the Klondike was not the triumph or disappointment awaiting them at the end of the trail, but the "Trail of '98" itself.

Of the five main gateways to the Yukon, the Chilkoot and White Pass trails became tunnels through which the great majority of stampede poured. Although they were virtual obstacle courses, both had the advantage of being the fastest routes to the gold fields. The all-Canadian routes, one originating in Edmon-

ton and the other from Fort Wrangell on the Stikine River were both more difficult and much slower than the Chilkoot or White Pass routes. The fifth, from the port of St. Michael in Alaska via the Yukon River to Dawson, was the least demanding in a physical sense, but was time consuming at a time when speed in reaching the gold fields could be the difference between success or failure.

The Chilkoot Pass, despite its formidable appearance, proved to be the main gateway to the Klondike. For many years a bastion against the white man's entry into Alaska, the pass was finally opened in 1881. From that date a small trickle of prospectors began to seep through the pass, until, in the climactic autumn of 1897 the trickle became a torrent.

The trail began at Dyea, Alaska. A half-mile out of Dyea the trail crossed a toll bridge, widened into a wagon road for five or six miles

and became much rougher as it passed through Finnegan's Point, Canyon City, Pleasant Camp and Sheep Camp. Sheep Camp was at the edge of the timber line, the last place for stampedeurs to secure lumber or firewood. As a "last-chance" supply base, it developed into a small transient community similar to a number of "overnight towns" that sprang up along the trail only to disappear as the stampedeurs moved on.

From Sheep Camp to the summit four miles away, the trail rose sharply to an angle of almost 35 degrees. On this difficult stretch there were only two resting spots, the Stone House and the Scales. At the latter, everything was reweighed, packers' rates increased to a dollar a pound, and dogs and sleds packed on men's shoulders for the final assault. Once over the summit, the stampedeurs made their way down to Lake Lindeman via Crater Lake.

By mid-winter of 1897-98 improvements were made along the trail. Steps were chopped out of the ice on the last 150 feet of the ascent to facilitate the last and most difficult part of the climb. Later a rope lifeline was set up parallel to this stairway and shelves hacked out of the ice where men could step off the trail for a moment's rest. The Chilkoot Railroad and Transport Company constructed a tramway to haul goods from Canyon City to the summit. But like many such products of the Gold Rush, the tramway came too late. By the spring of 1899 the rush was over.

Of all the photographs taken of the gold rush, the one which became symbolic of the adversity of the trail depicts an unending black line of humanity, stooped and bent, scaling the Chilkoot Pass. Martha Louisa Black, writing some 35 years after the rush of '98, described the Chilkoot Pass as "the worst trail this side of hell." Yet it was in fact the best route to the gold fields. Of those stampedeurs who attempted the Pass some 22,000 made it to the Klondike. The difficulties encountered by those who chose it over alternate routes were more a result of their own limitations than the problems posed by the Pass itself. Few who participated in the gold rush were fit to attempt the Pass. Many had never done anything more physically demanding than office work, while those in better condition lacked alpine experience. This inexperience, combined with inappropriate food and improper clothing, added to the hardship.

Further, in the autumn of 1897, the Northwest Mounted Police ordered each stampedeur to pack a year's food and supplies, the equivalent of one ton, before being allowed entry to Canadian territory. Carrying about 50 pounds on his back at a time, the packer moved his outfit in relays of five miles, cached it, and repeated the process about 30 times until the entire load had been moved. It has been said that the average stampedeur took 90 days to pack his goods over the passes to the head of navigation at Lake Bennett, and that by the time this task was completed a man could have walked 2,500 miles.

The White Pass route from Skagway was about 45 miles long through Log Cabin to the head of Lake Bennett. Six hundred feet lower than the Chilkoot, it was suitable for the use of pack animals and wagons. A wagon road led out of Skagway for several miles until it disappeared on terrain knotted with precipitous hills jutting out from swampy base land. The trail passed through Devil's Hill and Porcupine Hill until it finally reached the summit. From there, it descended an obstacle course to Lake Bennett. Yet 5,000 men chose the White Pass as the most feasible way to the gold fields.

In one respect the Skagway route became an extension of Skagway itself - a stage upon which the rough and brutal life of the coastal city was played against the backdrop of an even starker reality. Robert Service, capturing the essence of the Yukon, wrote that on the White Pass "there is no mercy, no humanity, no fellowship. All is blasphemy, fury and ruthless determination."

The one factor favouring the White Pass over the Chilkoot - that pack animals could be used - became its nemesis. By the late autumn of 1897 the trail was known as "Dead Horse Trail". It is said that over 3,000 horses perished on it. Mercilessly overpacked, a horse on the Skagway Trail was expected to live for six weeks at best. In an environment where men cared little for themselves, it was not surprising they cared nothing for their pack animals.

By late 1897 the White Pass route had become so impassable it was closed and George Brackett began to build a wagon road along the mountainside and over the summit. This improvement was followed by construction of

the White Pass and Yukon Route from Skagway to Whitehorse. But by the time the rail line was completed, the Klondike gold rush was over.

To many, the story of the Chilkoot and White Passes is a witness to an inhuman and perhaps insane side of man's character. To all those who came over them, it was an experience they were never to forget.

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Dawson City is a town of about 500 citizens. Only crumbling buildings remain of the once thriving saloons, theatres and shops of 70 years ago. The most productive mines, some 30 miles away, now yield only asbestos, yet each summer, thousands of visitors still come from the "outside" to retrace the steps of the gold rushers of '98.

Because of the unique history of the Yukon, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has undertaken a long-range restoration program of nearly \$2 million. The project is centered around Dawson, Bonanza Creek, Whitehorse and Bennett on sites which will form part of an international historic park being planned with the United States. This is the first integrated park program by Canada and the United States, and the project will involve development and preservation of both historic and natural resources.

One park feature will be the development by both countries of their sections of the historic Chilkoot and White Pass Trails. It was along the tortuous trails leading from the Alaskan panhandle cities of Skagway and Dyea to Bennett, British Columbia, that the treasure hunters were marooned between 1897 and 1900. On the shores of Lake Bennett they built log scows and canvas boats to battle the rapids and take them down the shifting channels of the Yukon River to Dawson City. In the spring of 1898, when the lake ice broke, the thousands of makeshift craft cast off for Dawson.

In the wake of gold rush optimism, for the "rush" was in fact over, a railway was completed from Skagway to Whitehorse in July 1900. Bennett, now a station of the White Pass and Yukon Railroad, will be the site for exhibits depicting the hardships endured by stampedeurs on the trails, the building of rafts and scows, and the construction of the railway. The White Pass and Yukon established a pattern of transportation that continued, with only minor variations, until the 1950's. Ocean freighters delivered freight to Skagway, where it was loaded onto railway cars and carried 110 miles to Whitehorse for final transfer to sternwheelers on the Dawson run.

The S.S. Keno, a sternwheeler which once plied the route, was refurbished by the National Historic Sites Service and now rests at Dawson as a monument to the importance of the sternwheeler to Yukon transportation. The ore-carrier S.S. Klondike is being restored at Whitehorse and will serve as a Klondike transportation museum featuring displays of transportation equipment.

A Yukon Historic Waylays is also planned to trace the water route from Whitehorse to Dawson and ultimately from Bennett to Whitehorse. Historic sites will be marked along the river, and riverbank camp sites developed at appropriate intervals.

The focus of the Canadian restoration plan will be Dawson City with the old Post Office as main visitor information center. Properties

Behind the Scenes

As an individual marks the events of a lifetime, so a country measures its steps to nationhood by commemorating its history.

The job of recommending the persons, places and events significant to our national history belongs to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. All provinces are represented on the Board. Many of the members are historians or archivists of distinction. Their collective academic achievements occupy over 200 lines in Canada's Who's Who.

The 14-man Board is appointed by Governor-in-Council as an advisory body to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, whose department is responsible for national historic parks and sites. The Board's recommendations may result in the Department inscribing a plaque, purchasing and restoring a historic building, establishing a major national historic park, or co-operating with provincial and municipal governments or historical societies for the restoration of architecturally or historically important buildings. Examples of the latter are the Mallico House in Quebec City, Craigflower Manor in Victoria, and the Matheson House in Perth.

Since its first meeting in Ottawa 50 years ago, the Board's recommendations have resulted in the marking of over 600 historic sites across the country and in establishing more than 50 parks.

The Board's recommendations to the Minister are implemented by the National Historic Sites Service. The Service was created in 1959 and employs a specialized staff that includes historians, archaeologists and curators to develop, interpret, operate and maintain historic parks and sites.

The pattern of restoration of national historic parks shows a greater number of parks in the East than in the West and reflects too heavily the military aspects of our history. To achieve a better thematic and geographic balance, several new parks are being planned in western Canada - the Riel House at St. Vital, Man.; the Motherwell Homestead and Fort Walsh, Sask.; Nooka and Fort St. James, B.C.; and the Klondike Gold Rush International Historic Park, extending from Bennett, B.C. to Whitehorse and Dawson City, Y.T. and including Dyea and Skagway, Alaska, and the celebrated Chilkoot Trail leading from Dyea to Bennett.



Members of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada at their 50th anniversary meeting, October 1969. Front row, from left: James J. Taitman (Ont.), Allan R. Turner (Sask.), chairman, Jean-Jacques Lefebvre (Que.). Back row, from left: Leslie Harris (Nfld.); Peter H. Bennett, secretary, Assistant Director (Historic Sites), National and Historic Parks Branch; E. S. Russenbult

(Man.), Miss Helen MacNeil, assistant secretary, Roy D. Palmer (P.E.I.); George MacKinnon (N.B.); Peter B. Wolfe (N.S.); Lewis H. Thomas (Ala.); Marc L. Turner (Que.); W. E. Taylor (Maritime Museum); James K. Nesbitt (B.C.). Not shown: Willard J. Smith, Acting Dominion Archivist; Donald G. Creighton (Ont.).

The Chilkoot Pass, "the worst trail this side of hell" - was in fact the best route to the gold fields. (See The Trails of '98).



now or soon to be under the national historic parks system include Robert Service's log cabin, a blacksmith shop, the Yukon Commissioner's furnished residence, the Northwest Mounted Police married quarters, a hotel, a newspaper, a general store and a residence typical of the early 1900's.

An exhibit spanning some 75 years of Yukon gold mining history to be established in the Bonanza Creek area of the Park will include an enormous dredge six storeys high, the famous Bear Creek "Gold Room", and a miner's sod-rooted log cabin. The dredge, a gift from the Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation Limited to the Historic Sites Service, is located about a half-mile from Discovery Claim, 12 miles north of Dawson City, "Number 4", as it was known, was built between 1906 and 1909 by the Yukon Gold Company on Bonanza Creek and operated until 1958.

In the "Gold Room" dredged ore was washed, weighed, processed and melted into bars. The one-storey building will be moved 12 miles from Bear Creek to Discovery Claim and restored with its original equipment. At Discovery Claim, the National Historic Sites Service will also build and furnish a miner's log cabin typical of the era of '98 when thousands panned the gold-rich gravel of the Klondike Valley. By 1905 the gold-bearing creeks were exhausted and improved mechanical methods, organization, and capital were needed for further development. The dredge, an innovation of large-scale mining enterprise, was to keep the gold mining industry operating for another 50 years.

Piecing History Together

On washday 72 bags of grime bits of pottery, brick and glass are emptied into National Historic Sites Service washing machines for a four-minute rinse. The "unwashables" — lead shot, cannon balls, building hardware and ships' fittings thick with rust and mineral scales — are dry-cleaned with a pressurized spray of aluminum oxide or, for less heavily corroded artifacts, a fine shower of silicone beads.

The Ottawa artifacts laboratory of H.S.S. is central repository for objects unearthed at historic sites, contains apparatus for cleaning and preserving a variety of materials ranging from clay pipes to 200-year-old boot leather. Archaeologist Iain Walker, head of artifact research, directs a staff of 15 artifact analysts and 10 technicians in the painstaking tasks of sorting, cleaning, numbering, cataloguing, mending and analyzing a bewildering range of fragments.

Pieces of ceramic, for example, are sorted into 25 categories — such as porcelain or coarse earthenware — according to glaze, colour, and shape. Acanthian ceramic types are currently being studied in the laboratory. Only after restoring perhaps 50 pots with similar characteristics can it be described as a "type" and findings published.

When mended into recognizable form, the objects are passed to the artifact analysts. Peter Priess, an archaeologist specializing in the study of building hardware, points to the significance of artifacts in reconstructing our knowledge of history.

"There are very few references to these mundane things. Nobody bothered to write about them. Besides, antique books of reference are expensive to obtain. And, in general, past studies have overlooked mass-produced articles shipped in quantities to the colonies for studies of the more spectacular prestige ware," he said.

Pointing to a massive set of hinged bolts, Priess explained they were once attached to the gate of 18th-century Fort Beauséjour. The excavated site near Sackville, New Brunswick, yielded only rotted wood remains of the gate, but from the position of the buried hardware archaeologists determined how the gate functioned.

"The social and physical environment can be glossed over in historical accounts and

journals, but on the basis of what is found on the site you learn who was making what and who was selling to whom," Priess said. This was strikingly illustrated at the site of the 18th-century French fortress-town of Louisbourg in Nova Scotia, where artifacts showed that the French were carrying on considerable trade with their New England adversaries. Such knowledge is cumulative as analysts compare artifacts of known origin with unknown from another site.

Archaeologists feel there is generally an appalling tendency to think everything must be in books. Much is not in books. To guide archaeologists and engineers in reconstructing the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park, many thousands of 18th-century records including building plans, bills, inventory lists and journals, were collected from archives in France, England, the United States and Canada. But, as Walker points out, historical documents can't always be trusted. Neither, it seems, could some 18th-century building contractors. According to the contractors' plans there were supposed to be seven underground buttresses for one part of the Château St. Louis, (the main building at Fortress Louisbourg). The structures were in the building contract, the plans, and the bills. But when the area was excavated only four had been built.

Although National Historic Sites Service archaeologists seldom come upon human bone in their digs, live skeletons were unearthed from beneath what was once the chapel floor in the Governor's Wing in the Château St. Louis at Fortress Louisbourg. Historical information indicated one belonged to a former governor of Louisbourg characterized as an "irritable man," says Walker. However, examination of the governor's remains showed he had suffered hardening of the arteries and other physical disabilities which, for one thing, prevented him from turning his head. This is the sort of detail that fascinated Walker who finds Canadian history a depressingly long list of battles and dates. He is more interested in finding out about the anonymous people who never get into history books, like those living in the wilds of Cape Breton Island in the 1750's.

Even animal bones are relevant. At Fort Beauséjour National Historic Park, archaeol-

ogists found the separate remains of debris left by English and French occupants of the fort, and pieced together the differences between an Englishman's and Frenchman's menu. When England controlled the seas a variety of foodstuffs was exported to its garrisons. The colonial French had poor contact with the mother country. This is borne out by finding that French colonists had to depend on hunting more than their English counterparts who were relatively well supplied from home.

"In general, the field of excavating recent North American sites — those dating from the time of Columbus — is quite new, not more than 10 years old. People have always been interested in finding exotic objects d'art but not in excavating sites to see how the average man lived. That is why we still know so little," Walker said.

Findings from Canadian sites are also relevant in a world-wide context. At one time ships from Liverpool and Bristol moved between the ports of Nova Scotia, the colonial United States, Africa and Asia. As a result National Historic Sites Service archaeologists have requests for information on French and English material found in Alabama and Ghana and have been asked to date 19th-century material found in Australia. Tightly dated artifact deposits found in many Canadian colonial sites are not available in London or Paris. French archaeologists excavating a site in Paris can date some of the layers of debris, jumbled by centuries of inhabitants, guided by material of established date and origin from colonial Quebec.



1 In the Klondike Valley the sluice method of gold mining replaced panning used by earliest prospectors and remained the main method until replaced by dredges. Paydirt was shoveled into the sluice box and a swift current of water diverted over it. Gravel was washed away and heavy gold-bearing rock was caught by parallel chutes at the trough's bottom.

2 The log cabin once inhabited by Robert Service, English-born Klondike poet, is typical of the log shacks thrown together by the stampedes of '98. Service wandered into the Yukon after the rush had ended, and in 1906, at the age of 21, began work as a Whitehorse bank clerk. Later transferred to Dawson City, he listened to the yarns of oldtimers of the rush and recorded them in verse.

3 Some of the first stores on Front Street, Dawson, where almost anything could be had for a price. In the autumn of '98, two small buckets of vegetables grown in a Dawson patch brought \$53.75 in the marketplace.

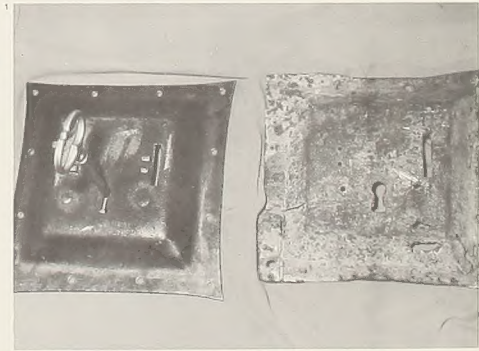


1 An 18th-century corroded armor lock found at the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park is displayed beside its replica, crafted for the Governor's Wing of the reconstructed fortress.

2 A ball and ankle chain once shackling prisoners at Fort Beauséjour, N.B. are examined after cleaning and treatment, by, from left, technician William Lawson, laboratory supervisor Miss Yvonne McNeill, and artifact research head Iain Walker. Drawers contain other metal artifacts found on the site.

3 Pieces of the 18th-century green glazed jug mended here were recovered from the Restigouche, N.B. underwater site. Mending pottery demands patience and skill at fitting together fragments of related colour, shape and thickness.

4 Two-centuries-old leather boot soles found at Fort Beauséjour, N.B. are treated with an acetone and lanolin preservative by technician Fazur Rahman.



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